The UNHCR Programme for Repatriating Afghan Refugees

The British journal "The Economist" of February 29, 1992 writes about Afghanistan on page 28 "Afghanistan is a world leader in indices of misery and deprivation: the world's lowest life-expectancy (42 years), the second highest child mortality (300 deaths per 1,000 live births), biggest refugee problem (perhaps 3.5m in Pakistan, more than 3m in Iran), worst disability rate (more than 2m Afghans are disabled, one in five the victim of mines). Less than two-thirds of the farmland is cultivated. The country cannot feed its present population, let alone millions of returning refugees".

The UN/UNOCA report states that the under-five-mortality rate is 298 per 1,000 live births; that the maternal mortality rate is 690 per 100,000 deliveries; that the average life expectancy is 40.5 years for women, and 42 years for men; that a women has an average of seven live children; that less than 4 % of the rural population of Afghanistan has access to safe drinking water.

Statistics from the time before 1978 mention that the infant mortality rate was 200 per 1,000 births; that the average life expectance was 41 years. ASIAWEEK puts the infant mortality rate in 1991 at 162 per 1,000 births.

ASIAWEEK reports that the per capita GNP in Afghanistan in 1991 was USD 150....110 in Cambodia....160 in Nepal....180 in Laos....190 in Bhutan....200 in Vietnam....208 in Bangladesh ....350 in India ....380 in Pakistan ....450 in Burma....463 in Sri Lanka... 605 in Indonesia....725 in the Philippines....1,605 in Thailand... 1,670 in Turkey....2,465 in Malaysia. Afghanistan was amongst the ten poorest nations on earth before 1978, and the upheavals, foreign occupation, and war have caused more destruction and poverty. Obviously, one could question the accuracy of these figures, but we can assume that they are between, say, a plus/minus 25 % range of reality.

The figures most often stated on population in Afghanistan say that there are a total of about 17m to 18m Afghans. Dr. Thomas Eighmy (USAID) and the UN/UNOCA state 17.5m, and ASIAWEEK 17.7m. Thereof about 6.5m as refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and about 11m inside Afghanistan. Again, one could question the accuracy of these figures, but they are the only figure we have. Newspapers and journals often state that "about 1.5m people live in Kabul". This would suggest that perhaps as many as 4m to 6m Afghans live in the larger towns and cities of Afghanistan, and perhaps only as many as 5m to 7m in rural, agrarian regions.

The UN/UNOCA report (page 17) states that there is a wheat/flour deficit, and it states "This conjunction has created a growing wheat/flour deficit, which has been estimated at between 200,000 MT and 650,000 MT, with 400,000 MT a reasonable compromise figure". The British journal "The Economist" of January 11, 1992 writes that "The Kabul government had to import 500,000 tons of wheat to

get over the winter 1991/92"....add to this about 60,000 to 100,000 tons per year supplied by the UN/WFP through Pakistan.....add unofficial imports of wheat from Pakistan.......the UN/UNOCA report says on page 17 "The deficit is primarily made up by unofficial imports of wheat from Pakistan". The DAI Commodity Price Survey in Afghanistan; statistics from the Ministry of Statistics, Kabul government (quoted by DAI); newspapers and journals; ARC's RDP workers from Ghazni and Logar, and travellers from Kabul and other regions -- all report that food prices have increased by around 75 % per year in each of the past three years. Afghanistan's currency has rapidly depreciated, from 10.8 Afs/Rupee in January 1989 to 52.0 Afs/Rupee in January 1992 (53.0 Afs/R during the first week of March 1992). In particular people with low incomes suffer first and foremost from inflation and rising food prices.

Pakistan has once more become a wheat importer -- Pakistani newspapers reported that 1.8 to 2.0m tons of wheat need to be imported before April/May 1992 (the wheat harvest starts in April), and that Pakistan had to apply for loans to finance these imports. Wheat production in Pakistan increased from 4.0m tons per year during the early 1960s to 12 to 14m tons per year during the 1980s and early 1990s. However, Pakistan's population increased from around 40m in 1960 to more than 110m in 1991. The government of Pakistan will have to increase wheat prices considerably in order to encourage farmers to produce more, and in order to discourage unofficial exports (wheat prices are higher in Iran and India, hence there are unofficial exports to these nations from Pakistan).

Russia and the nations of the former USSR are the by far largest grain importers on earth. They import about 30 to 40m tons of food and feed grain per year. Since they require loans to finance these imports, and because they already have a large foreign debt, they will be less able to supply wheat/flour to Afghanistan. Iran and Iraq import well over 50 % of their total food requirements. Iran's population has increased from 22m in 1960....to 40m in 1980....to 58.5m in 1991 (official figure from 1991 census). However, Iran and Iraq have oil and gas exports to finance food imports. Population increases by about 3.8 % per year in Iran and Pakistan.

These are some indices on the environment and context in which REPATRIATION and DEVELOPMENT are supposed to happen. These figures also point at priority or emergency needs in relief, assistance, and development. When discussing repatriation, we ought first to consider the following, universal phenomena.

1. Labour movement or migration tends to be from nations with low incomes to economic regions with higher incomes. For example, major <u>labour importing nations are:</u> Saudi Arabia, other OPEC nations, Northern Europe (in particular West Germany), Canada, and the USA. <u>Major labour exporting nations are:</u> Yemen, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, Syria (primarily to OPEC nations), Turkey and Yugoslavia

(primarily to Europe), Pakistan (about 3m Pakistanis in the Gulf nations), India, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. Iran was a labour importing nation from 1974 (the oil-boom) until the recession in 1977/78. Iran has become a labour exporting nation (newspapers recently reported on an increasing number of Iranians illegally in Tokyo).

2. High population growth rates mean that there are -- as a percentage of the total population -- many young people. For example, 50 % of the population in Pakistan is below the age of 20 years. MANY YOUNG MEN OF WORKING AGE WOULD REQUIRE JOBS. Very small farms cannot be further sub-divided amongst 2, 3, or 4 sons. And also the sons of soldiers, administrators, and shop keepers will need jobs. Since the already very small farms cannot be further subdivided, additional jobs would have to be created in industry, services, the administration, and the army. A wide-spread phenomenon observed in under-developed nations is, that the large labour supply inevitably leads to a bloated, over-staffed army, security apparatus, and adminstration, with too many young men in unproductive jobs. On the other hand, industrialization -- to create jobs, to employ young men in productive jobs -- would first require infrastructure building (roads, railroads, electricity, etc.), together with appropriate economic policies designed to promote infrastructure building and industrialization.

The recent, rapid depreciation of Afghanistan's currency -- from 10.8 Afs/R. in January 1989 to 52.0 Afs/R in January 1992 -- as well as inflation in Afghanistan are largely due to the fact that the Kabul government gets the money to pay its army, security apparatus, and administration not from taxation, but from printing more money.

3. Having a very small farm or peasant holding means, that the farmer or peasant has full-time work only for a very few weeks each year -- at planting time and at harvesting time. For the remaining time he is serverely under-employed, unproductive, hence his income is low. If there were industries -- hence jobs -- available in the rural centers, then he could take a part-time or full-time job, earn wages, and he and his family could work the small farm during evenings and weekends. However, decentralized industrialization would first of all require a good, decentralized infrastructure.

Furthermore, if and when there is a peaceful settlement, and if the future government follows a more responsible fiscal and monetary policy, there would have to be a DEMOBILIZATION of the various armies, and LAY-OFFS in the administration and security appartus. As many as 0.5m to 1.0m men of working age could be without jobs.

REPATRIATION AND DEVELOPMENT WOULD REQUIRE LARGE SCALE, RAPID JOB-CREATION THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE BUILDING AND INDUSTRIALIZATION.

Increasing the food supply -- or increasing the farm output -- will be impossible in the short term, and very difficult in the medium and long term. For all of the following reasons:

1. Afghanistan imports all of its phosphate requirements. Phosphate imports used to come from the West, primarily the USA, before 1978, and they were to a large part financed by USAID and other foreign aid donors. The Afghan Fertilizer Company received technical and financial assistance from the Asian Development Bank. Phosphates were imported from the USSR after 1978. Expect no increases in the food/farm output unless phosphates are provided to farmers.

2. Afghanistan has one very old urea plant at Mazar-i-Sharif. This plant used to operate in the USSR, was dismantled, shipped to Afghanistan, and re-built at Mazar-i-Sharif 1972 - 74. It has a rated capacity of 110,000 tons per year, but one UN report says that it now operates at only 50 % of the rated capacity. Urea is made from air (the nitrogen) and natural gas (in the Haber-Bosch-Process). The official urea price has been increased in 1990 from 1,000 to 1,600 Afs. per bag (50 kgs), but the going market prices were up to 10,000 Afs/bag, averaging about 8,000 Afs/bag in 1990. This indicates that farmers are willing to pay high prices for urea. The phosphate prices are even higher, and DAP averaged around 10,000 Afs/bag in 1990. Expect no increases in the food/farm output unless adequate amounts of nitrogen fertilizers are provided to Afghanistan's farmers.

At least 100,000 tons of phosphate and 100,000 tons of urea per year would have to be provided to begin increasing the food/farm output in Afghanistan.

Foreign aid donors and international lending agencies would have to finance these phosphate imports and part of the operating costs of the urea plant in Mazar-i-Sharif (or build a new plant) in order to provide fertilizer to farmers at low costs.

Note that some relief workers in Peshawar recommend that farmers in Afghanistan should use more animal manure, or better utilize the animal manure available on farms in Afghanistan. The facts are however as follows: (1) Farmers don't throw away or otherwise waste animal manure -- on the contrary, they know its value and use it diligently; (2) It is impossible to increase the animal manure production in Afghanistan, unless there is an increase in the livestock numbers, but that is impossible, unless more livestock feed becomes available.

Farmers in Afghanistan have always most diligently used -- and not wasted or thrown away -- all the animal manure they have available.

3. Afghanistan's seed industry was in its infancy in 1978. Wheat improvement had started only in 1966, with technical and financial aid from FAO, USAID, India, and CIMMYT (for wheat); from France (for cotton). The Afghan Seed Company (ASC) was established with technical and financial aid from the Asian Development Bank. And subsidized loans (Agricultural Development Bank of Afghanistan) were available to help farmers buy seed and fertilizer. Expect no increases in the food/farm output, unless good seed of improved crop varieties is provided to farmers.

4. If a farmer is a subsistence farmer -- that is, if the major portion of what he produces is for home consumption -- then he sells little, hence has very little money to buy things. And he will need that money to buy salt, spices, tea, sugar, edible oil, clothing, shoes, candles, or maybe a lamp and kerosene, and other essentials. He will have no money to buy seed, fertilizers, tools, or any other farm inputs, hence he simply cannot increase his food/farm output.

Note that small relief agencies and other small foreign aid donors don't have the money and other means required to have any influence on items 1 - 4 described herein above on pages 4 and 5. It would require peace; and appropriate economic policies by the future government; and large scale aid and loans from the major foreign aid donors and international lending institutions.

UN agencies -- primarily the FAO, UNHCR, and UNILOG -- have been sending large amounts of seed and fertilizer to Afghanistan from or through Pakistan. This has helped to stem the decline in the food/farm output in Afghanistan.

The Agricultural Survey of Afghanistan (ASA) of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) works since 1987 on crop variety improvement and seed production, and has already identified a number of suitable wheat varieties. This -- together with the seed wheat and fertilizer deliveries by UN agencies -- has helped to stem the decline in Afghanistan's food/farm output.

And a large number of NGOs working out of Peshawar have contributed through distributing the seed and fertilizer provided by those UN agencies. However, financial constraints have forced the UN to considerably down-scale its programmes, hence the NGOs will in the future have less fertilizer and seed to distribute in Afghanistan.

5. Rehabilitation of the Irrigation Infrastructure. This has been recommended in the "ACBAR Guidelines for Agricultural Rehabilitation in Afghanistan" because a considerable part of Afghanistan's irrigation infrastructure had been destroyed or not properly maintained since 1978 due to the foreign occupation and the war. Many NGOs have been doing such rehabilitation work in their project regions in Afghanistan. The destruction or neglect,

and the need for rehabilitation, obviously differ greatly between regions, and each NGO must survey its project region to determine what needs to be done. These are ideal pay-for-work projects, providing immediate income (the wages paid by the NGOs) to local labour.

Note that approximately 80 % of Afghanistan's food and fiber output is produced under irrigation, and irrigation water is the most important external input for most farmers in Afghanistan.

Some relief and aid workers in the NGOs in Peshawar state that greater efforts should be made "to better utilize locally available resources" and "to reduce the reliance on expensive, external, non-sustainable inputs".

Farmland, irrigation water, and manpower are the by far most important, locally available resources. These resources can be better utilized -- to produce much more food and fiber -- if farmers use good quality seed of improved crop varieties, and adequate amounts of fertilizers for appropriate plant nutrition. These external inputs (seed and fertilizer) will increase crop yields, thereby increasing the efficiency and utilization of the locally available resources land, irrigation water, and manpower.

6. If one has a very small farm -- and the vast majority of farmers in Afghanistan have only 2 to 20 jeribs (equal to 1.0 to 10 acres) of farmland -- one cannot make a living from growing low value broad-acre crops like wheat. To make a living from such a small area of farmland, one must grow high value crops like grapes, other fruits, nuts, poppy, olives, or vegetables. This is the reason why many farmers in Afghanistan had specialized in high value crops -- more than 30 % of Afghanistan's export earnings before 1978 came from raisins and other dried fruit. However, if one plants a fruit, nut, or olive tree today, it will bear fruit and produce income only in about 6 to 10 years -- and until then it will cost money for irrigation, fertilizer (or manure), and pest control. Poor farmers don't have the money to invest in expanding their orchards, and to wait 6 to 10 years for the first return from that investment. Only vegetables and poppy require very little investment, and produce a return a few months after planting. But not all farmers can grow vegetables -- only those located near a town or city have a market for vegetables.

It would require a good infrastructure (roads, etc.) and plants that process, pack, ship, and market the produce to stimulate production of fruits, nuts, olives, vegetables, and other high value crops. Only then could a larger number of very small farms make an adequate income. It would require peace, an appropriate economic policy by the future government, foreign aid, and lending by the international lending institution, to build the required infrastructure and processing plants.

Increasing the food/farm output in Afghanistan in the short term would require all of the following: (1) rehabilitation of the irrigation infrastructure; (2) at least 200,000 tons/year of phosphate and nitrogen fertilizers made available throughout the country at low prices; (3) good quality seed of improved field crop and vegetable varieties made available throughout the country at low prices. These are the means that will increase the farm output most with least costs and in the short term. A concerted, well coordinated effort by all foreign aid donors -- parhaps under the leadership of the FAO -- would be required to do that.

Note that, for each one ton of fertilizer used by farmers in Afghanistan, 10 to 15 tons of wheat equivalent (food) do not need to be imported.

Although this will probably be one essential component in making repatriation possible, it will most likely not be the only one: the other will be infrastructure building and industrialization in order to create productive, well-paying jobs for a fast growing population.

Note that there obviously are many other needs in Afghanistan, and that much needs to be done to improve the living conditions of rural Afghans -- the fuel/energy problem is severe in most rural households; its a burden primarily for women; it contributes to deforestation; it means poor, uncomfortable living conditions. Or a reliable supply of clean, safe drinking water; or vaccination, other preventive medicine, and basic health care.

This paper is to point out that the individual peasant can do very little, that rural and agricultural development, and that attempts to increase the food and fiber output require certain policies, certain macro-economic conditions, a rural infrastructure, and certain inputs -- like fertilizers, seeds -- which the individual farmer simply cannot produce.

Certainly, locally available resources should be utilized as best as possible. Natural gas and air are natural resouces available in abundance in Afghanistan -- they can be converted into urea, and urea will help to better utilize -- to increase the food and fiber ouput -- the locally available resources land, irrigation water, and manpower. Imported phosphate and good quality seed of improved vegetable and field crop varieties will contibute towards better utilization of the locally available resources land, irrigation water, and manpower.

That will produce more food and fiber, that could help increasing the incomes and living conditions of Afghanistan's peasants and farmers -- but it will not employ, it will not give income to the 2, 3, or 4 sons that every family in Afghanistan has. To provide jobs, incomes, and better living conditions to them would require

infrastructure building and industrialization. Otherwise these 2, 3, or 4 sons will have to look for work and income in the urban, industrial centers of Iran and other OPEC nations, but there they will have to compete with an abundant supply of labour from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Yemen, Sudan, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.

This paper also aims to point out that subsistence peasants normally are very efficient resources allocators, making best possible use of all the resources they have available at the farm or peasant holding. Consider only the following examples:

1. He doesn't plough in, waste, or throw away straw, stubbles or other crop residues -- he uses them to feed ruminants, and these ruminants in turn produce a little bit a milk, and that serves as a protein supplement in his cereal-based diet. His ruminants also graze on waste land, under trees, and along roads, ditches and drains, thereby utilization all locally available forage. He has to pay for that eventually with a declining organic matter content in his soils, a declining soil fertility, hence lower crop yields.

2. For fuel he uses locally available resources, like wood, shrubs, roots, or dried cow dung. This costs less than buying eletricty, oil, or gas, although he has less fertilizer for his fields, although deforestation may eventually cause soil errosion.

3. He doesn't use a tractor and fuel, but oxen, and they are fuelled by locally grown grass, straw, and other crop residues.

4. He doesn't waste or throw away animal manure, doesn't buy fertilizer, but uses whatever animal manure he has available to fertilize his fields, and for domestic fuel.

Study any subsistence peasant holding and peasant household anywhere in Afghanistan, and you will find very little or no waste, you will find that the peasant makes best use of all resources available at his holding.

It sounds very nice, caring, and enlightened to now recommend to this peasant "Low External Input Sustainable Farming" (LEISA); or "better, sustainable use of locally available resources"; or to warn him not to use "expensive, external non-sustainable inputs"; or to tell him "to protect the natural environment". All that sounds beautiful to Western ears, especially Western, urban ears. But that poor peasant in Afghanistan is already operating with the least possible or no external inputs; that poor fellow is already making best use of everything he can get his hands on. He just wants a better life -- a higher income -- for himself, his family, and in particular his children.